

# Japan Christian Activity News

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NATIONAL THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE  
The Emperor System--  
Ideology and Christianity

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THE CHURCH, THEOLOGY AND THE EMPEROR  
SYSTEM

A National Theological Dialogue on "The Tenno (Emperor) System--Ideology and Christianity," co-sponsored by the Commission on Faith and Order of the NCC-J and the Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), will be held in Tokyo, Feb. 21-25, 1983. Twenty-five persons from Japan and seven from overseas are expected to participate.

Japanese churches have been considering issues related to the nationalization of the Yasukuni Shinto Shrine, discrimination against Koreans and Buraku-min (a group of Japanese citizens discriminated against), and the relation of those issues to the tenno-system. The Japanese superiority complex toward other Asian people and the collectivistic mind of company employees in Japan are also rooted in the tenno-system ideology.

The dialogue will focus on:

- 1) considering what the tenno-system is and the meaning of the ideology politically, economically, and culturally from the Christian point of view;
- 2) hearing the testimonies of people, especially the oppressed and those who have been struggling against the tenno-system and its related ideology;
- 3) re-examining the church and its mission in the light of 1 and 2.

The following article by the Rev. Prof. TSUKADA Osamu of Rikkyo (St. Paul's) University is being prepared for CCA publication by JCAN.

While the church does not come into existence through its theology, theology does grow out of an intellectual evaluation by the church of its various experiences. A church which lacks an adequate theology has the potential of making mistakes and falling into crises due to arrogance, or self-contentment, or distorted human nature. Looking back over the long range of church history we find that the Christian community has theologized in each generation by evaluating and examining experiences based on the Christian faith in the context of the community's total life including culture, various religions, society and politics.

However, in the beginning of Christian mission in Japan newly converted Christians, obviously less experienced in Christian life and faith, depended on the theologies of the mother churches of the West. Since Japan had a highly developed culture of its  
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own Japanese Christians' desire to learn from others resulted in their having to swim in an overwhelming flood of imported theologies. In this cultural, religious, social and political situation Japanese Christians sought, by trial and error, to live the Christian life and accepted foreign theologies as a living resource for building an indigenous theology.

After the nightmare experiences of World War II, instead of using these experiences as resources for theology, the Christian community in Japan avoided an evaluation of those wartime experiences, again depending on the imported theologies of the mother churches. Although international exchanges have increased in today's society, and imported theological studies are surely adaptable, Japanese Christian theologians cannot escape the criticism of not being seriously concerned with producing an indigenous theology based on interpretations of faith during the pre-war and war period in Japan. After the war the "mother church" must no longer be searched for in the West but must be found in the Christian community in the Japan which experienced suffering during the war. That is to say, indigenous theology in Japan must start by examining our past experiences and the various past interpretations of our faith. It is in this context that the emperor system will be examined and evaluated.

### I. Japanese Christianity Under the Absolute Emperor System

After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the emperor, as absolute, forced Christians to be "nationalistic" or "Japanese Christians" living under the emperor system. The Christians also wished to be recognized as "patriotic" and they hoped to become believers in a "Japanese Christianity." It is a well known fact that Christians from the warrior class (samurai) took responsible roles in the Meiji Restoration, combining their social responsibilities with a Christian sense of mission. Patriotism and a motivation to promote "Japanese Christianity" can be perceived in the concern of the first Protestant Christians active in the early ecumenical movement which was evident in the organization of the Yokohama Church in 1872. What, then, was seen as the theological response during this process of forming "patriotic" or "Japanese Christians"?

1) A strong desire to serve Japan was one intent of those building relations between the universal church and local congregations. "Ecclesia" found in the Pauline letter has the meaning both of the church universal and of the local congregations. In other words the local church expresses the reality of the universal church and does not contradict this universality. It does not mean, according to Paul, that there was an ideal, universal church in addition to the local church. Nor was the universal church regarded only as a concept with the local congregation seen as the reality. Thus, the Japanese church embodied the nature of the universal church even when identifying closely with the geographical, racial and cultural characteristics of its environment. However, this also meant that fellowship with churches of different backgrounds and various races and cultures was indispensable if the Japanese churches were to maintain their universality. How then, do we understand what actually happened during the Japanization of Christianity?

Around 1925, with the end of Emperor Taisho's reign and the start of the Showa Emperor's reign, Japanese Christianity gradually was transformed into "imperialistic" Christianity, by the Japanese government's pressures separating the Japanese church from fellowship with other Christian communities in the world. Europe and the USA specifically were delineated as enemies. These manipulations very nearly resulted in the Japanese church's losing its universal churchliness. However, while many churches were thus losing their vision of universality as international relations were cut, the Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholic churches in Japan found that their inherited emphasis on universal church connectionalism served as an anchor

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to help maintain their universalism.

2) The indigenization of the church in Japan from the beginning of the Meiji Restoration (1868) to the end of World War II was in the direction indicated by the demands of the State. Christians accepted as unchangeable destiny the national, traditional Shinto faith and accepted it as the reality in which they were placed. The traditions of the past Japanese perceptions of nature, and ties with the soil of Japan were accepted as the "holy root" for the growth of an indigenous Christian faith. But is indigenization of the Christian faith for the individual simply an identification of that faith with the individual's cultural heritage? Is it true that our concept of humankind and our world-view must include the belief that everything in the present world is as willed by God? Must indigenization then, include accepting the status quo with an unquestioning evaluation of that status quo? Proper indigenization is to identify with the changing future of Japan, related to the new Japan to be created with a new image of the Japanese people. But in the pre-war period, under the absolute emperor system, those who sought identification in a "new future Japan" were severely dealt with and eliminated both individually and as a community. Only those willing to follow Japan's national polity were allowed to function.

## II. Tenno, the Emperor as a Living God, Symbol of the Nation, and Christianity as a Private Religion

In order to resist the pressures from the West, to promote controlled modernization and to strengthen the nation and the military, the Meiji Government (1868-1910) tightened its control over the people's minds by forcing belief in the divinity of the Emperor through the Imperial Constitution. What did this mean for Christians and for the people of Japan?

1) The goal was to establish a national structure without freedom of thought or of religion by making the emperor a god so that people's basic values and meaning in life both originated in and were defined by the emperor. I call this phenomenon "the confiscation of religious questioning." Because of this "confiscation" people did not raise ultimate questions: they could see only the worldly present and blindly follow, without question, the orders from above. This approach produced obedient technocrats, war-mongers, bureaucrats and merchants. At the same time a comfortable, safe life was provided for the population. They were told that they need not worry but should just "carry on". The power of the imperial system overrode the religious inquiry which Jesus' message of the coming of the Kingdom of God, his warning of a final judgment, and his invitation to repentance should have stimulated. Each person was nailed down securely in their places in society.

2) The enforcement of national Shinto based on the divinity of the emperor meant that all other religious activities were interpreted as "private concerns." This understanding of religious activity did not contradict the teachings of other religions in Japan which viewed religion as primarily concerned with secrets for success, stress on self-discipline, or certain cultural and moralistic precepts. At the beginning of Protestant history in Japan, Christianity was characterized by "not smoking, not drinking, and not having more than one wife" since these were the apparent concerns of both missionaries and early Christians.

Christianity interpreted as private religion emphasized the mission of the church as saving individual souls, as seeking moralistic repentance in behavior, and as teaching the practice of asceticism and personal discipline. In this light, the moral superiority of the West as explained by both early missionaries and Japanese Christians, was seen as supporting some of the same goals as the emperor system. Christianity in Japan lost its power to be that which "turned the world upside down...." (Acts 17:6)

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3) The identification of the Japanese people with the divine emperor and therefore their sharing in that divinity were promulgated as agents of the emperor disseminated the basic principles of "Nihon-kyo" (religious nationalism) teaching people that the proper act of worship is to understand oneself in relation to the Japanese people and the emperor, without reference to any other universal or transcendent principle. In other words there was a usurpation of universal and transcendent power by the imperial system. In this usurpation of universal and transcendent power by the emperor system elements of original sin are clearly visible. Even if people questioned their personal status within society, they could not question the emperor system itself for the very state was founded on the emperor system. Therefore no questions could be raised about ultimate responsibility. In this way the emperor was supreme. Even so, however, his role transcended responsibility, for his responsibility in relation to World War II was never pursued. Nevertheless, though the emperor was not considered personally responsible, those who fought in the name of the emperor were convicted as war criminals. And now some of those same persons judged to be war criminals are presently enshrined at the Yasukuni Shinto Shrine as military gods and are worshipped by the emperor and the prime minister, by cabinet ministers, and by other members of the House of Representatives. Within the structure of the emperor system, as long as people were satisfied they could not raise religious questions concerning an ultimate God. In fact, when that type of question arose, answers were always found within the pattern of the emperor's rule. This is what was meant by saying that the emperor was a god.

The religious structure of the emperor's status has not changed even today with the emperor considered symbol of the nation. Even when denying his divinity on January 1, 1946, the emperor maintained traditional relationships with the people by bestowing instructions from the imperial throne, and by recognizing the Five Articles of the Charter Oath proclaimed by the Meiji Emperor. He continues to carry out various traditional religious ceremonies in the imperial court and visits the imperial ancestors at Ise Shrine and Meiji Shrine. Each Prime Minister after his inauguration has visited Ise Shrine to indicate faithfulness to the imperial throne. Despite protests by Christians Prime Minister OHIRA Masayoshi, himself a Christian, visited Ise Shrine because of political and social pressures. As long as these religious influences remain in Japanese society we must remain alert, particularly for possible calls to "Japanese patriotic Christianity".

### III. The Imperial Rescript of Education and Western Learning

The Imperial Rescript of Education in 1890 promulgated the concept of basic education for the sake of national polity. The impact of the Rescript is illustrated in the case of UCHIMURA Kanzo, who was accused of committing a "criminal act" of disrespect to the emperor when he refused to bow to a copy of the Imperial Rescript. Though many Christians were shocked by this incident, no one had adequate insight into the serious meaning of the Imperial Rescript. For example, during an investigation by the imperial military police in 1938, Bishop UCHIDA Yasutaro of the Anglican Church of Japan's Osaka District said, "People ought to obey the Rescript as absolute, for the Bible is a book teaching the way of salvation of the soul."

The Imperial Rescript of Education provided answers to religious questions. It consisted of three parts: (a) a statement of the absolute authority of imperial instructions, (b) the delineation of virtue as following these imperial instructions, emphasizing that the concrete response of the people is obedience in support of the everlasting imperial throne, and (c) a call for cooperation for unity based on the intimate relation between the emperor and his people for the sake of the national polity. In this context the Christian faith was placed in a position of cooperating in the practice of virtues as defined in the second part (b) of the Rescript. Only in

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this way was the Christian faith recognized as a religion. In other words, Christianity (as part of Western learning-- yosai) was to serve the modernization of Japan within the framework of the Japanese spirit (wakon). At that time Western countries were considered to be "Christian nations" and Western civilizations were understood as "Christian civilizations." People believed that the advancement of education, culture, and medical institutions in Japan indicated the supremacy of "Christian civilization." The Christianity which took advantage of the spread of imperialism by the West functioned as a salesman of Western knowledge without recognizing its own role. The theology which undergirded this so called imperialistic Christianity emphasized the "victorious Christ." The image of the victorious Christ shown in the stained glass windows in churches in Western countries grew directly out of their understanding of the Christian faith. The image of the victorious Christ as King demonstrates his authority and power. The foreign mission programs that were supported by this image expanded the influence of the "Christian World" along with the spread of the esteemed civilization of the West.

Responding to the sending churches, the receiving churches sought to further spread the blessings from the "Christian civilization." Christian evangelism was symbolized by the church tower with a cross on the top and included establishing kindergartens, schools, and social and medical institutions. In fact, the Christian activities which had such success in education and social and medical institutions were responding to Japan's modernization process as encouraged by the government's promotion of Western skills (yosai).

However, this "successful" Christianity greatly failed in spreading the Gospel, which stirs up religious questions. Christians who proclaimed love, peace, and God's justice were attacked as being non-Japanese (hikokumin) who did not follow the imperial orders of the Rescript of Education. They were persecuted and imprisoned in much the same way that Jesus was condemned. Jesus was also persecuted because he challenged the idea of racial pride, that sense of pride of being God's chosen people, and spoke out against injustice. Through the sufferings of those who opposed national polity as found in the Rescript of Education we need to see that "Christ on the cross" as important rather than emphasize the "victorious Christ."

#### IV. National Shinto and the Church

The Meiji Government used National Shinto for the purpose of educating the citizenry of Japan for loyalty and patriotism. All other religions in Japan took the same role.

The traditional custom of ancestor worship was used as a focus around which to unite the nation by relating it to the emperor and his throne. The Meiji restoration was carried out by breaking down the feudal system of the Tokugawa Shogunate and organizing a new system under the headship of the emperor. With this new structure came policies for strengthening the nation and the military, building industries, and promoting modernization for a new civilization. As the modernization process many people left their ancestral villages (the primary village) to work in industries in urban settings and many of the second and third sons of farmers were drafted into military service. These people not only had left their villages, they were also separated from their ancestral graves. In order to satisfy their need for meaningful community life participation, they looked for artificial or secondary village-type groups in such places as schools, companies, or other organizations.

The founding of the Yasukuni Shinto Shrine and the establishment of State Shinto

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assured that those who had lost contact with their primary villages and their ancestral graves would have a holy place for ancestral worship through the nation-as-family. Not only that, but all local Shinto Shrines were centralized under the emperor's supreme priesthood with each shrine following imperial instructions and offering worship toward the emperor's residence. Local castles and temples were also places where loyalty and duty to the emperor were stressed. Before anyone realized it, the state had taken the place of the primary village in our hearts and minds. In the early 1930s the church was also drawn into the framework as a "secondary village" and in 1937 the government issued a document forcing the churches to participate in nationalistic education. The Greek word "ecclesia" (those called out, the gathering) was translated as kyokai--a word made up of two Chinese characters, "teaching" and "meeting". In this way the church became a place for providing a secondary village. After 1945 many Christians who had had bitter experiences during the war hesitated at identifying the churches as a secondary village, and so they emphasized the church's teaching aspects. However, since the church as a meeting place for teaching cannot satisfy people's desire for a community of fellowship, the church must emphasize the community and unity of all humankind. We have seen the dangers in the local egoism, provincialism, and sense of superiority which are inherent in the emperor system. Most of the churches could not protect freedom and human rights in their local areas. Those in the church who stressed freedom and human rights were rejected and persecuted by people who supported the state polity for the sake of the emperor system.

## V. Future Tasks

The church through its wartime experiences under the emperor system of Japan faced many issues related to indigenous theology. The following points are concerns for us in constructing an indigenous theology for the future.

- 1) Having experienced the Japanization of Christianity during the war one concern forced on us is the basic relation between the universal church and local churches, that is, the ecumenical issue. How can the special gifts of the local church be used to witness to the universal church of the Lord Jesus Christ? We urgently need to open our eyes to the ecumenical movement which has been rather passive in Japan.
- 2) For the indigenization of theology the universal church must be realized clearly at the local level. This can be done by identifying ourselves with that-which-is-different from the majority, and by that difference we will be changed through God's blessing and power. Despite being loyal citizens, Christians in Japan were identified as not Japanese (hikukumin) by the emperor. In fact, because of this "non-Japanese" status we Christians can now identify more easily with other races of people in the world--we are given universal identification opportunities.
- 3) As modernization progressed the Christianity which was in the forefront of Japan's modernization was cast away as no longer needed. The image of the church symbolized by the victorious Christ identified with Western civilization was changed to an image of the ridiculed, dispirited, sacrificed Christ on the cross.

In the postwar period when European theology was guided by an emphasis on "the sovereign, Lordly Christ" the Japanese church again grabbed this imported theology. Victory, glorification, and joy were welcomed after the sufferings before and during the war. We tried to ignore our valuable war-time experiences in order to forget the bad dreams of the past. As a result, we once again depended on imported

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theology. We must start our indigenous theology from the perspective of the suffering servant, the sacrificed Christ.

4) The Christian churches in Japan have continued to give the impression that they are part of a foreign religion. The church is still viewed in the framework of being a "teaching place"; thus the church does not become the true community--the place to which we will be able to return ultimately. The church should liberate us from the binding community based on natural family relations, that is the first village. We must also refuse to be assimilated into a tight quasi-community of the secondary village type which provides comfort and security for people with no home town. At the same time, individual freedom and value must be protected from the state which may try to skillfully utilize the secondary village benefits for its own purposes. The church should demonstrate that oneness with humanity and that cooperation which ultimately will liberate us from the isolation and the exclusiveness of the village mentality.

In this sense the church can be perceived as the "third-village". The universality and localism (individuality) of the local church must be expressed concretely to the people who are outside of the church so that they will find a compelling image for identification in the "third village". This third-village can become a strategic base at the local levels for the realization of the universal community by its reaching out to all humankind. The third-village liberation from the oppression and confinement of the first village breaks the isolation found in the secondary village which was formed into a structure of totalitarianism under the emperor system. The church is truly a meeting of people beyond nationality of whom the Bible speaks when it says "our homeland is in heaven." (Phil. 3:20)

Prof. TSUKADA Osamu  
(From Feb. 1982, Fukuin to Sekai)

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## FUJIYOSHI TRIAL BEGINS

Missionary Ronald FUJIYOSHI, who was indicted on June 16 of this year for refusing to be fingerprinted upon applying for his Alien Registration Certificate, went on trial Sept 27, at 1:30 P.M. at the Kobe Summary Court. (See Sept. 1982 JCAN.)

By 1:00 P.M. about ninety of Fujiyoshi's supporters gathered in front of the court house. Since only twenty-four were allowed into the court room the others held a rally outside until the hearing ended. People who attended the trial included Mr. KAWAKAMI Tamio, a Socialist member of the Diet; and representatives from different Korean residents' associations, and the Korean Christian Church in Japan.

Fujiyoshi's lawyers immediately submitted a petition requesting a change from

the Summary Court to the District Court due to the human rights nature of the case. The judge said that he will rule on the request at a later date.

During the court proceedings, Fujiyoshi presented a short statement about his reasons for refusing to be fingerprinted emphasizing his background as a Japanese-American growing up with discrimination in California and Hawaii.

The movement to oppose fingerprinting of alien residents is growing. Twenty-five foreign residents of Japan have now refused.

Even members of the Diet have criticized the government in the light of the June 1979 ratification of the International Convention on Human Rights. #

(Jack McIntosh)



## FOREIGN TEACHERS OK IN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION BUT NOT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

On Sept. 13 the Diet passed a law allowing government universities to hire non-Japanese as regular teaching staff. Until this act, non-Japanese could be hired only on one-year contracts; but there are still restrictions on the non-Japanese staff in that they will not be allowed to hold administrative positions such as dean, department head, or chairperson of the school council.

Following the passage of the new law the Ministry of Education, on Sept. 18, issued demands that at the primary and secondary levels of public schools non-Japanese are not to be hired as teachers at all. This is seen as being aimed particularly at Koreans of long term residence in Japan--most of whom were born and educated in Japan.

The government is apparently countering local educational initiative that has resulted in non-Japanese citizens being hired as public school teachers in some locations. At present twenty-five prefectures have Koreans-in-Japan as teachers.

Protesting this discrimination the NCC-Japan has asked the Minister of Education to withdraw his orders against the hiring of non-Japanese in public schools. #

## TOMISAKA CHRISTIAN CENTER APPROVED

The Tomisaka Christian Center, located at 2-9-4 Koishikawa, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo, on Oct. 4, requested the North Sub-district (Kita-shiku) of the Tokyo District of the United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan) that it be recognized as a Kyodan related institution. Rev. SUZUKI Shozo, Director, appeared at the Kita-shiku regular executive committee meeting to interpret the aims and hopes of the Tomisaka Christian Center and to explain how the Center's work could relate to Kita-shiku mission.

The executive committee enthusiastically approved recommending to the

Kyodan that the Center be recognized as a Kyodan related body. Many on the executive committee felt that the Center could strengthen the concern Kita-shiku has for Asia related mission.

Dr. Suzuki, who came to the Center Aug. 1, reports that the Center hopes to develop its program and building project in order to provide a place for interaction among Christian lay people and pastors of Japan and persons from other Asian churches and to provide a place for study and research in Asian theology.

At a meeting of the Board of the Center scheduled for Oct. 28, plans will be considered to begin working toward these goals.

Rev. Jan Gird Beinke, a missionary from the Evangelical Church of Germany, will work with Dr. Suzuki at the Center. Mr. Beinke is presently in language school.

Kita-shiku leaders are optimistic that the Center will be registered as a Kyodan related organization. # (R)

## SCHOOL ON SUNDAY UNCONSTITUTIONAL?

On Oct. 19, at 11:30 A.M., Rev. SAWA Masahiko, pastor of the Koiwa United Church of Christ in Japan (Kyodan), appeared at the Tokyo District Court bringing suit against the Tokyo Metropolitan Government charging that requiring children to attend school on Sunday violates Japan's constitution. Article 20 of the constitution reads, in part, "Freedom of religion is guaranteed."

Public schools in Japan, on occasion, hold classes on Sunday so that parents can visit school and watch classes. On June 13 the Sawa family decided that their children would attend church school instead of being in class on the scheduled parent-visitation day.

The suit grew out of his children's being recorded as absent on June 13. NHK-TV (Japan Broadcasting Corp.) had a report of the suit on Oct. 19. #